

VZCZCXRO3305
PP RUEHPA
DE RUEHRY #0274/01 1581331
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061331Z JUN 08
FM AMEMBASSY CONAKRY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2621
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CONAKRY 000274

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/06/2018
TAGS: [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [GV](#)
SUBJECT: TEACHERS WARN OF POSSIBLE LABOR STRIKE

REF: CONAKRY 244

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Guinea's teachers' unions continue to threaten a possible labor strike, which could begin as early as June 10. Such a strike has the potential to spark civil unrest, as it did in a similar situation in 2006, especially among the country's students. It is not yet clear whether a strike will take place next week or not, but continued political tensions and economic frustration contribute to a generally volatile political climate. END SUMMARY.

TO STRIKE OR NOT TO STRIKE...

¶2. (SBU) On May 29, in the midst of a week-long military mutiny, Guinea's two teachers' unions (SLECG and FSPE) notified the Government of Guinea of a possible labor strike as early as June 10 (reftel A). However, on May 30, the head of SLECG, Louis M'Bemba Soumah, publicly stated on the national news network (Radio Television Guinean - RTG) that because the population appeared willing to accept the new prime minister, the country's labor unions would also support him, provided that he demonstrates his willingness to adhere to the January 2007 Accords.

¶3. (SBU) On June 2, the Secretary General of FSPE, Elhadj Bamba Camara, and the Deputy Secretary General of SLECG, Elhadj Souleymane Savane, issued yet another declaration. They denounced Soumah's public statement, claiming that Soumah did not speak for the unions. During a subsequent telephone conversation with POL LES, Soumah said that RTG had manipulated his statement, and that he fully supports and represents the interests of teachers' unions. He added that the teachers had not backed off from the possibility of a strike, and would proceed with negotiations.

¶4. (SBU) According to the pre-notification, most of the unions' demands focus on economic issues including increased salaries, an increase in the transportation allowance, and payment of salary arrears. In addition, the unions claim that the appointment of the new prime minister, Dr. Ahmed Tidiane Souare, violates the January 2007 Accords.

¶5. (SBU) Poloff had two separate meetings scheduled with Louis M'Bemba Soumah over the course of this week, but Soumah canceled both at the last minute. For the second meeting, Poloff requested that Soumah come with his colleagues Camara and Savane, but Soumah told Pol LES that he wanted to come alone as he would feel more comfortable, and could speak freely. Poloff finally met with Souleymane Savane and Bamba Camara on June 6, without Soumah present. She also met with the Minister of Education, Dr. Ousmane Souare, on June 5 to discuss the potential labor strike.

MINISTER OF EDUCATION NOT WORRIED

¶16. (SBU) Minister Education Souare (cousin to Prime Minister Souare) repeatedly told Poloff that he did not think the unions would go forward with the strike. He said that he had approximately \$8.9 million budgeted to meet their demands, but that the money would not be available until July since he had to spend June's budget on expensive national exams. A member of SLECG himself, Minister Souare said that he had told his union colleagues that a strike does not make sense and that it would be an "irresponsible" decision to go forward with it. He added that students and parents would likely protest the strike, which could spark violence. The Minister noted that he had a meeting scheduled later in the day with the unions in order to discuss their issues.

¶17. (SBU) When Poloff asked why the Minister had postponed the national exams to the week of June 23 (instead of the week of June 9 as originally scheduled), Souare said that the postponement had nothing to do with a potential strike even though the media claimed otherwise. According to Minister Souare, he postponed the exams because of the unrest surrounding last week's military mutiny.

AN EXPLOSIVE SITUATION

¶18. (SBU) During Poloff's meeting with union leaders, the Secretary General of SLECG, Souleymane Savane, explained that

CONAKRY 00000274 002 OF 003

most of the unions' demands date back to at least 2005. He said that it was the teachers who "got things started" initially, and that the other unions, notably CNTG and USTG, only jumped on the train after the teachers had already got it moving. He emphasized that although the teachers' unions are members of the larger Unions-Intersyndicale, under the leadership of Dr. Ibrahima Fofana and Serah Rabiadou Diallo, they are still independent and must represent the interests of their membership. He later said that he is in touch with both Rabiadou and Fofana, and they support the potential strike.

¶19. (SBU) When Poloff asked "why now?," Savane launched into a long-winded oratory about how the issues have been festering for at least three years and nothing has been addressed. Poloff acknowledged that there are long-standing problems that need to be resolved, but pressed Savane to explain why they were pushing through with a strike in the aftermath of a military mutiny and a generally volatile political situation.

¶10. (SBU) Savane said that the unions' decision has nothing to do with the current political context, and that they had actually started the process in April with a letter to the Minister of Education. Savane said that the Minister never responded to the letter, but that the teachers' issues were discussed at a Council of Ministers meeting with Kouyate, although ultimately nothing was done. According to Savane, the issues pre-date the appointment of the new prime minister, Dr. Ahmed Tidiane Souare, and the decision to move forward with a strike had nothing to do with Kouyate's dismissal.

¶11. (C) Poloff asked the unionists if they were willing to risk possible civil unrest in order to hold their strike. Savane said that unionists are passive and the strike will consist of nothing more than simply staying home. Poloff pointed out that if there is violence, it is likely to come from the students, to which Savane said "the whole situation is explosive, whether our strike provides the spark, or something else does, that is not our responsibility." He added that the teachers do not control the students and that

if they should decide to demonstrate, that is their prerogative.

¶12. (SBU) With respect to the June 4 meeting with the Minister of Education, Savane said that the Minister invited the unionists to meet with him and that they accepted. However, when asked how the negotiations went, Savane said "they were not negotiations; no one has started negotiations." According to Savane, the Minister told the unionists what the GoG had already done for them, and then everyone left. Savane emphasized that promises will not be enough. "We must see the proof of their promises to avoid a strike," he told Poloff, pointing out that the GoG has been promising them things for three years, but nothing has materialized.

¶13. (SBU) Noting that one of the unions' demands deals with the appointment of the new prime minister, which they claim violates the January 2007 Accords, Poloff asked how the unionists expect the GoG to address this issue given that much of the population appears willing to try and work with him. Savane did not answer the question directly even though it was raised several times, instead saying only that the "Accords must be respected."

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Savane came across as a fervent militant committed to the strike, despite the possibly violent repercussions. He repeatedly said that the unionists are pacifists, but it was clear that he knows exactly what is at stake, and may even be hoping that the strike could serve as a catalyst for a political transition. POL LES conversations with various union contacts suggest that there may be significant support for this strike at the grassroots level. However, the continued absence of key union leaders such as Rabiadou and Fofana, who remain in Geneva for an international labor conference, raises several questions. Political tensions are high with the threat of additional crises looming, and yet the self-identified leaders of the people are making no moves to return?

¶15. (C) The Minister of Education claims that he has the money to meet the unions' economic demands. Sources indicate that the World Bank has already given the Ministry \$10

CONAKRY 00000274 003 OF 003

million as part of its Poverty Reduction and Growth Plan. However, during a recent Ambassadors' G8 meeting, World Bank and IMF representatives questioned how the GoG will meet the military payroll needs in June, let alone any teachers' demands. The IMF representative indicated that for the GoG to meet the financial demands of the mutineers, it may have to reallocate funds from other ministerial accounts. The World Bank representative expressed concern that the \$10 million from the World Bank to the Ministry of Education effectively expands the Education budget, creating an opportunity for the GoG to divert Education resources for the military. The GoG appears to be coming up short on cash, and the demands continue to mount.

¶16. (SBU) At this point, it is not clear whether a strike will materialize next week or not. The unions came right up to the eve of a strike in January, and then backed down at the last minute because of lack of support from the population. However, the situation with the military mutineers is not yet resolved, and people are increasingly desperate economically, and frustrated politically. The situation remains volatile. END COMMENT.
CARTER